

Toronto set to expedite greenhouse gas cutback; Proposal going to council suggests target of carbon neutral by 2050, with expedited options

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Byline: David Rider Toronto Star Chief

Body

Toronto will speed up efforts to reduce the city's greenhouse gas emissions and eventually become carbon neutral, under a "climate emergency" motion headed to city council.

The proposal from right-leaning Mayor John Tory and left-leaning Coun. Mike Layton, with input from local environmentalists, will update the city's previous target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions to 80 per cent below 1990 city levels by 2050.

Tory announced Thursday the previously announced emergency declaration will, if passed by council, commit the city to reach net zero - where the amount of greenhouse gases Toronto produces does not exceed what it removes or offsets - by 2050.

Also, city staff will late next year give council options to try to reach that carbon-neutral goal a decade earlier, by 2040.

"I'm not in a position to say what it will mean in terms of resources we will expend in 2020, or in the years thereafter, except to say that the motion specifically contemplates our staff being asked to identify measures to accelerate our progress," Mayor John Tory told reporters.

"I wouldn't have signed it if I hadn't been prepared to say, 'Well, it's going to mean increased efforts and increased investments and increased collaboration with others to get this done.'"

The city revealed in July that Toronto has cut greenhouse gases 44 per cent below 1990 levels, beating a targeted 30-per-cent emissions reduction by 2020.

Layton, who had earlier welcomed the mayor's intention to declare a climate emergency but said the declaration needed to be more than window-dressing, hailed the new commitment, as did the Toronto Environmental Alliance advocacy group.

"The motion looks to strengthen targets in the short and long term, advance actions more quickly, and include those impacted most by climate change in bringing forward climate solutions," said Layton (Ward 11 University-Rosedale).

Retrofitting Toronto Community Housing buildings to make them more energy efficient, buying electric vehicles including new TTC buses, and enticing Torontonians to get to work by foot, bike or transit, instead of car, are among initiatives in the 2017 TransformTO climate action strategy.

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Some people criticized Tory on social media, when he announced the climate emergency call, for his support of keeping the east Gardiner Expressway aloft, at an estimated cost of more than \$1 billion, rather than tearing down the aging overpass and building a ground-level boulevard for half the cost.

The mayor denied wasting money to keep motorists happy while trying to cut tailpipe emissions.

"The amount we're spending on rebuilding a small part of the Gardiner Expressway pales in comparison to what we're investing in public transit to get people out of their cars entirely," Tory said.

Layton, who in 2015 failed to convince a majority of council colleagues to opt for the east Gardiner boulevard option, said "maybe these new (greenhouse gas) targets mean we have to change course on that on that (Gardiner) decision."

However the Gardiner isn't in the current TransformTO plan in, he said, adding any debate by the new 25-member city council about the east Gardiner is somewhere down the road.

With files from Jennifer Pagliaro

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